

On the May 11 primary election ballot, Lincoln voters will answer the following question concerning the rights of homosexuals:

"Shall Article X, Section 1 of the Charter be amended to include Sexual Orientation under the Nondiscrimination Provisions of the Charter? Vote FOR or AGAINST."

If passed by city voters, the sexual orientation amendment will be added to the city's human rights ordinance.

GAY RIGHTS:

Discrimination case prompts proposed changes in ordinance

By Leslie Kendrick

In 1981, Debbie Alicen of Lincoln told her boss she was a lesbian.

Alicen revealed her sexual preference because the woman she was living with was about to have life-threatening surgery. Knowing her boss might not let her off unless an immediate family member was ill, Alicen chose to tell her boss the truth.

Two weeks later, Alicen was fired without explanation. She later learned that she lost her job because she revealed she was a lesbian.

Cases such as Alicen's have prompted the Lincoln Human Rights Commission to conduct an investigation into local discrimination against gay men and lesbians, said Scott Stebelman, co-chairperson of the Lincoln Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights.

The commission then decided to have a public hearing Nov. 17, 1981, at which homosexual members of the community and those in favor of and opposing gay rights testified, Stebelman said.

As a result of the testimony, the commission made a recommendation to the Lincoln City Council that an amendment be made to the Lincoln Human Rights Ordinance to include homosexuals under the non-discrimination provisions. The city council voted, after several public hearings, to put the sexual orientation amendment on the ballot May 11.

If passed, the amendment would revise the non-discrimination provisions to include sexual orientation as a protective provision against discrimination. The provisions currently protect a person from discrimination against him or her because of race, color, religion, sex or national origin.

Stebelman said many other communities have enacted similar legislation to protect gay rights. Last Febru-

ary, Wisconsin became the first state to protect its gay citizens, he said.

The Lincoln Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Rights formed because of the need for a gay lobbying group, Stebelman said. It is involved in community action, education and lobbying for the amendment, he said.

Other gay groups in the community have formed to support their members, rather than for political reasons. One such group, the Gay Student Group at UNL, was established in 1970 by UNL undergraduates to provide a social group for gay students, faculty adviser Lou Crompton said.

The group, which meets weekly, averages about 25 to 30 members, Jim Holloway, president of the group, said.

Not many people are willing to show up at the meetings or dances which are sponsored by the group, Holloway said, out of fear of being labeled gay by others.

Opposition to the amendment has come from such groups as the Committee to Oppose Special Rights for Homosexuals, led by Paul Cameron, a Lincoln social psychologist, and Nels Forde, a UNL history professor.

Cameron said he became interested "as a person" in the subject of homosexuality in 1975. Cameron said he conducted an investigation about homosexuality in a random probability survey, a considerably larger study than the second Kinsey study. The Kinsey study interviewed homosexuals and heterosexuals about their sexual practices.

Cameron said he found that 1 percent of both men and women in the survey said they were exclusively homosexual.

However, Stebelman said the Kinsey study revealed that 10 percent of the national population is homosexual.

Cameron's committee opposes the amendment because, Cameron said, Lincoln would be, in effect, "giving a signal" that the city "celebrates" homosexual acts.

Stebelman said the amendment has the support of the Human Rights Commission as well as the League of Women Voters, the Nebraska Civil Liberties Union, the American Association of University Professors, the UNL Human Rights Committee, the ASUN Senate, and the American Psychological Association and 30 local mental health practitioners.

"There is only one local psychologist that has come out against the amendment, and that is Paul Cameron," Stebelman said.

Cameron said he objects to the amendment because he thinks homosexuals have an unstable lifestyle, that homosexual relationships are not within a marital love context, that homosexuality would endanger children and students and it would give the wrong signal to other communities.

Stebelman said in talking to various groups, such as the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce and the Sertoma Club, the coalition tries to show legitimate reasons for voting in favor of the amendment.

Stebelman said the major reason the amendment is needed is because discrimination exists. Employers need to ask themselves, he said, if a person is a productive worker or a good tenant.

"Personal prejudice should not interfere with keeping competent employees," Stebelman said.

In regard to religious questions, Stebelman said that although the Bible condemns homosexuality, it also condemns usury, breaking the Sabbath, eating shellfish and having premarital sex. If people want to discriminate on the basis of the Bible, Stebelman asks why single out homosexuality?

Reaction to amendment varies among mayor, council members

By Eric Peterson

The sexual orientation amendment on the May 11 ballot has received varied reactions from Lincoln's mayor and members of the Lincoln City Council.

The council voted unanimously to place the amendment on the ballot. Three council members have endorsed passage of the amendment, which would prevent people from being evicted or fired because of their sexual preference. Council members Margrethe Ahlschwede, Eric Youngberg and Mike Steinman favor the amendment. Council member Joe Hampton was absent from the meeting at which the vote took place. Other city council members are Bill Danley, Lou Shackelford and Donna Frohardt.

Lincoln Mayor Helen Boosalis said she favors the amendment.

"It's just very simple. I'm appalled and very disturbed by discrimination in any form. This issue is a matter of civil rights."

Boosalis says her position comes from a long involvement in civil rights issues.

"I just believe in equality," she said.

Hampton said the gay rights issue is so contentious that all council members felt the issue should be placed on the ballot.

"It was of enough significance that we felt seven people shouldn't decide the issue by themselves."

Hampton is not sure if the amendment is necessary.

"In my opinion, gay rights are protected under the current civil rights act," he said. Hampton said the amendment is a means of gaining social approval of homosexuality as well as protecting homosexual civil rights.

"Certainly, I'm in favor of individual rights, but I'm not in favor of protecting the (homosexual) lifestyle."

Council member Mike Steinman said proponents of the amendment are not necessarily seeking social approval of homosexuality.

"That's not true at all. If you look at the part of the (city) charter that this

ordinance would affect, you find that it covers minorities, people who take out bankruptcy and many more types of people." Steinman said the city was not, for example, trying to recommend bankruptcy by protecting the civil rights of bankrupt people.

"It's not a recommendation of any particular lifestyle," he said.

When asked if passage of the amendment could affect the image of Lincoln, Steinman said it could.

"Other cities have passed similar provisions, like Houston. I think they come off looking like tolerant, open-minded communities. I'm not saying Lincoln would be stigmatized by voting it down, but that certainly would be unfortunate."

Council member Bill Danley said he is unsure how effective the amendment attempt will be in changing public attitudes about discrimination against homosexuals.

"I think they (proponents of the amendment) have raised a lot of good questions, but I fear they've created a

lot of problems for themselves by bringing such a controversial issue up. It's created a lot of resentment among people who have deeply religious feelings about the issue."

Danley said homosexuals have made substantial social progress in Lincoln during the last few years, but are endangering this progress by ignoring "the reality of the political environment."

Ahlschwede emphasized that the ordinance would guarantee basic rights of living and working to all Lincolnites.

"I believe that it's important to protect the civil rights of all persons."

Ahlschwede said differing views about the amendment arise from different ideas of what a better Lincoln would be.

"Among those of us who are concerned with civil rights issues, the passage of this will ensure fairer treatment of all persons. For those who oppose the ordinance, I suppose they think Lincoln will somehow be a purer and finer place if it's voted down," she said.